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Mission Sunday: Sharing the Gift

"Last year when Pope John Paul was in Brazil, he went to visit the people of Vidigal, one of the slum communities that spill down the hillsides of Rio de Janeiro. He was so moved, so touched by the poverty he saw there, so bound in sympathy with the people, that he pulled off his gold ring of office and gave it to them.

"Just a few weeks ago, I read the sequel that event," said Father Joseph F. Reinhart, director of the diocesan Missions Office, as he opened the annual Mission Sunday campaign.

"The 'favelados' — as members of such desperately poor communities are called — decided among themselves to place the ring in the Museum of Sacred Art in Rio. A spokesman for the community explained, 'The ring was not given exclusively to us in Vidigal, but to all the favelados!'"

"This strikes me as a parable that Jesus Himself might have told to illustrate what we ought to do with the gift He has given to us. Do we keep the precious gift of faith exclusively to ourselves? Or do we seek to share it with our neighbors?"

"An equally beautiful part of this story is its parallel to Jesus' account of the widow's mite," Father Reinhart added. "Her offering was valuable in that it represented the offering of everything she had. For the favelados of Vidigal, who live in makeshift misery, the gift of the Holy Father's ring was a sacrifice of everything of value within their community. I stand in awe of these people and pray that our spirit of unity with the poor might be as deeply rooted as theirs.

"As we prepare for our celebration of Mission Sunday this weekend,"

Father Reinhart continued, "this incident takes on even wider significance because it illustrates the sort of relationship that should exist between communities of faith all over the world. We are one! We do not 'give our treasure away' to others; rather we magnify and enlarge what we have by drawing others to share it with us. As the people of Vidigal are enriched by the sharing of Pope John Paul's ring, so are we enriched when we share our gift of faith with the poor Churches of the Missions. How do we do it?"

"When the pope was in Ghana last year, he said that everyone who heard the Good News message must pass it on 'from village to village, from home to home.'

"We have the aid of radio and TV, films, 747s at our disposal to reach the furthest ends of the earth. And you can be sure the Mission



Father Joseph F. Reinhart, diocesan missions director, welcomes Sister Alexandrina, mother general of the Little Sisters of St. Francis of Uganda and Kenya, and Father Michael Pierce, a Maryknoll priest, on their visit to Rochester.

Church makes good use of them."

The missions director reminded that "Sunday, Oct. 18, is Mission Sunday, a day that is celebrated all over the world with the purpose of affirming the unity that exists among all who share the Body of Christ in the Eucharist and who are the Body of Christ. His own

propagation of the Faith to distribute the pool of funds where the Church is most in need. But I can assure you that the distribution is made as fairly as possible, and that without the help received by the 900 dioceses in the mission world, the Church as an institution of service, caring for the spiritual and material needs of the poor, could not survive."

H. added, "It takes faith. I know, to put a portion of your salary into the basket on Mission Sunday and allow the Society for the

propagation of the Faith to distribute the pool of funds where the Church is most in need. But I can assure you that the distribution is made as fairly as possible, and that without the help received by the 900 dioceses in the mission world, the Church as an institution of service, caring for the spiritual and material needs of the poor, could not survive."

Charities Denounces U.S. Haitian Policy

By John Dash

A storm is developing over the issue of federal policies toward recent Haitian immigrants. The National Conference of Catholic Charities has issued a denunciation of the federal policy to incarcerate Haitians in federal prisons, and late last week meetings took place in Washington, D.C., to establish a central office under the egis of the nations' bishops to report the conditions of Haitians in those prisons.

The Charities move was made at a national meeting in Las Vegas the week of Sept. 27.

Charities wants the government to "grant special status to Haitians coming to our shores, allowing for ample quotas to meet the urgent needs of the Haitians; . . . to

grant refugee status to Haitians coming to the United States, with the benefits allowed to refugees."

In addition, it challenged its own constituents to "promote the resettlement of Haitians into the United States as we have resettled refugees from many other countries of the world; . . . commend the dioceses of Florida in their extensive efforts to meet the needs of both Cuban and Haitian refugees over the years."

Charities also encouraged local branches to establish programs of visiting imprisoned Haitians.

The resolution stated that "Haiti suffers the lowest per capita annual income of any country in the Western Hemisphere; . . . this low level of subsistence is caused in large part by a repressive

political regime in Haiti; . . . the people of Haiti endure and suffer extreme degrees of poverty, illiteracy, disease, and a lack of true freedom; . . . numerous Haitians yearly risk their lives on the open seas to escape such terrible conditions."

The Charities' resolution also cited Charities' own history of concern for the plight of refugees and immigrants in making its move.

The national conference also called on the federal government to work for economic development in Haiti itself while also working for the welfare of Haitian immigrants.

In other developments, it was learned from an Oct. 6 memorandum from the state Department of Social Services that rumors circulating that

Haitian minors are being housed at the Federal Correctional Institution at Ray Brook are false. The memo stated that "some minor children arrived with the original group of people but were moved out within 24 hours."

As of Oct. 6, the memo also revealed, there are 140 children at the state children's facility Greer-Woodycrest. All of the children are Haitian and about 75 percent are male.

The Greer-Woodycrest facility has very recently contracted with the federal government to extend its program for three months, and "It is anticipated that at the end of this three-month period another three-month contract will be administered," the memo states.

Greer-Woodycrest is located in Millbrook.

The Charities move was in large measure made at the encouragement of Rochester diocesan Charities representatives Father Charles Mulligan, Maurice Tierney and James Maloney. The three presented the resolution which was drawn up after a recent meeting of the Cuban/Haitian Refugee Committee.

In addition, that group is also largely responsible for presenting the proposal that the USCC establish a Haitian Refugee Information Center, to be staffed three days a week, to "gather, digest and distribute specific information based on local personal contact."

Such a center, the group feels, "will also be a clearing house for problems (and suggested solutions) which will arise from time to time. It

will provide a focal point where a comprehensive vision of the problem and solutions can be formulated and projected."

Such activity on the part of the Church toward Haitians is nothing new. In 1977, the nation's bishops urged "our government in the executive, judicial and legislative branches to consider the matter of the Haitian refugees a priority concern that requires speedy, just and compassionate resolution."

"Specifically," the bishops wrote at that time, "we urge immediate cessation of all deportation proceedings against Haitian refugees now imprisoned solely for reasons of immigration, and the granting of amnesty or full refugee rights to all such Haitians now in this country."

State Regents Probe Charges about Handicapped Education

Willard Genrich, chancellor of the York State Board of Regents, told the Courier-Journal last week that he was "greatly concerned" over allegations that the state intends to remove all handicapped children from private school programs and enroll them in public school programs.

In a telephone interview, the chancellor said that "I



have ordered my staff to look into the allegations, and to make it a priority."

At issue is a report

presented to the regents by Father James T. O'Brien on behalf of the New York State Catholic Conference and the New York State Council of Catholic School Superintendents.

Father O'Brien, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Syracuse, told the regents, "The handicapped child, eligible for special services under law, cannot

attend a Catholic or Lutheran or a Jewish School with his brother and sister because treating him in as normal and accepting a fashion as possible, in the mind of some, would be both illegal and unconstitutional!"

Such an interpretation of the present law, he said, poses the danger of becoming normative, and therefore legislative action on the part of the regents is required.

Father O'Brien said that the interpretations were first given on July 7 by representatives of the state education department and the New York City Board of Education.

At the time, he said, non-public school representatives were told that certain placements of handicapped children in Catholic schools in New York City were inappropriate and that such a

placement could only be made where the public school program was seen as inadequate.

TV MISSION MASS

Bishop Matthew H. Clark will celebrate a television Mass for World Mission Sunday from 8:30 to 9 a.m., Sunday, Oct. 18, over WHEC-TV, Channel 10.